

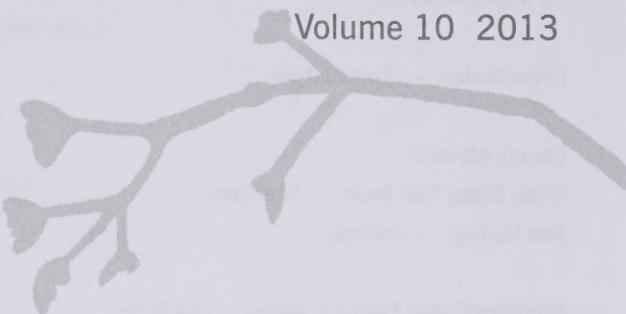
# MILESTONE

2013



# MILESTONE

Volume 10 2013



**Art & Literature Review**

Creative Expressions of Western North Carolina Artists & Writers



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Cover Design ~ Cynthia Ryon

Faculty Advisors

Owen Gibby, Toni Knott ~ Literature

Bob Keeling ~ Artwork

Managing Editor/ Layout & Design ~ Lisa Fisher

Editors ~ Emily Elders/Toni Knott

Mission Statement

*Milestone* is the biennial art and literature review published by Southwestern Community College. The purpose of this publication is to showcase the creative expressions of Western North Carolina artists and writers.

Editorial Committee

Kenet Adamson

Chris Cox

Owen Gibby

Bob Keeling

Toni Knott

Gene Norton

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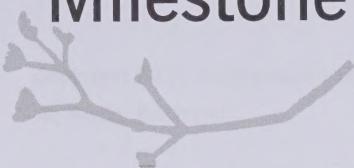
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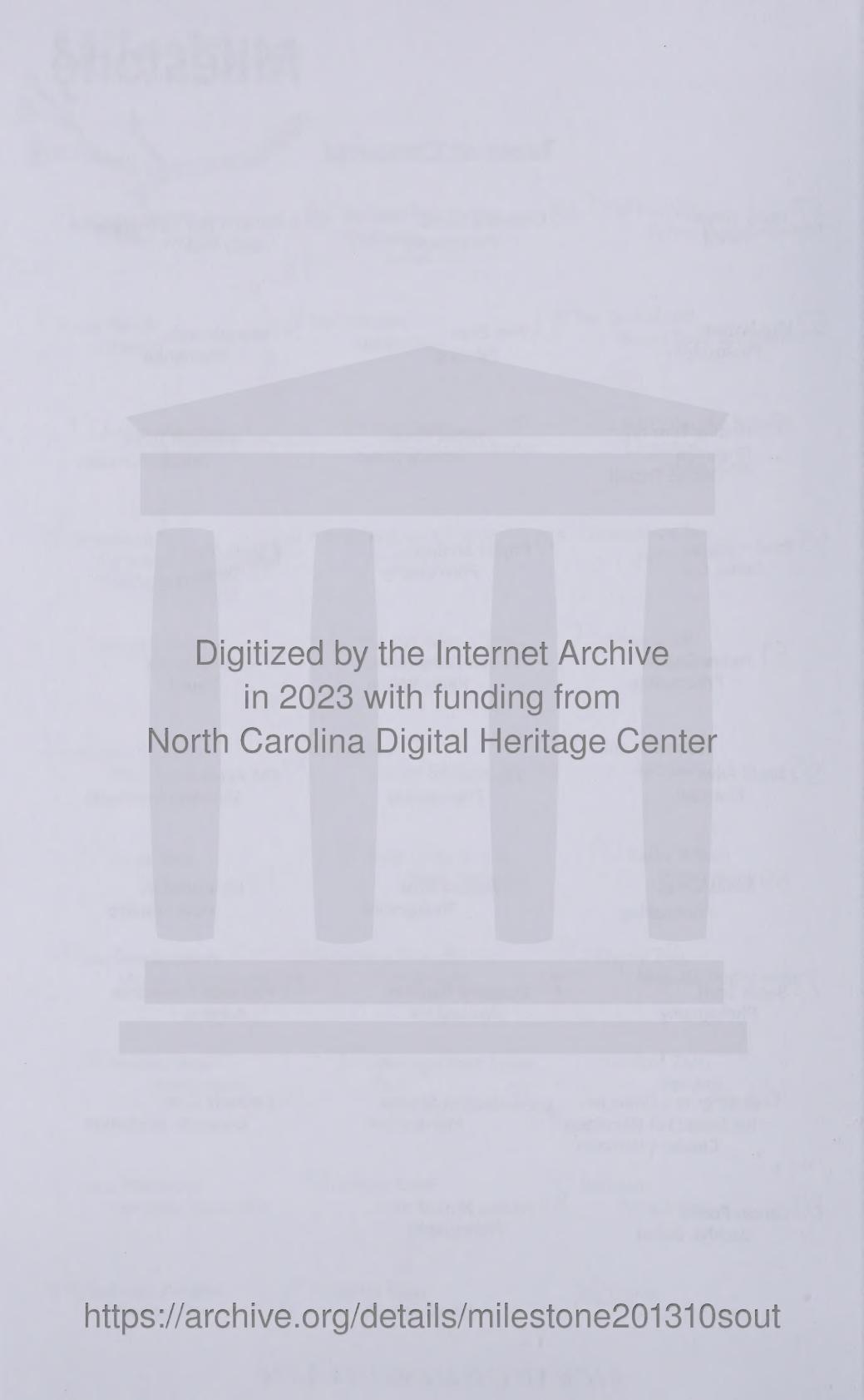
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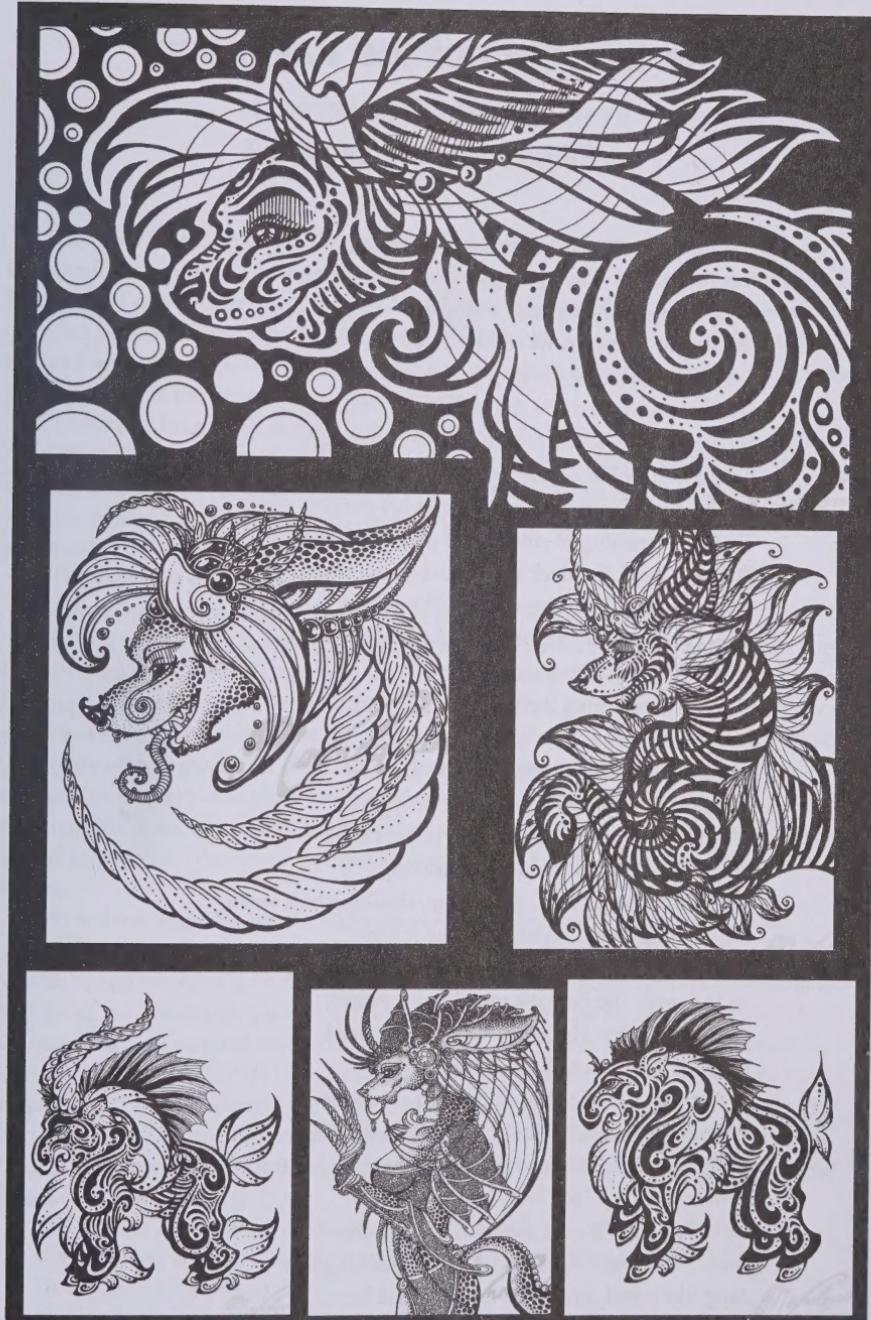
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MAXINE GERBER  
FIRST PLACE ~ ART

# The Last Run of the Vagabond

JAMES COX

FIRST PLACE ~ POETRY

The movement of the scow on the river  
was like a plow blade going through soft ground;  
the low waves thrust aside at the bow  
receded in domed rows rolling away  
behind the stern as the ship proceeded.  
One man aboard made the captain and crew.  
He worked the wheel and the crane forty years  
heaping the loads of garbage head high, full  
on the deck, the stench woven into his clothes.  
This, the morning of smiles, the scow rode light,  
the river dark, the deck washed, the man clear;  
The lanterns all in rows cast a yellow glow  
through the ebb of night. The splash of the wake  
against the pier was a clean refusal.  
The dumpers lining the docks, blue phantoms  
in a depth of shadows, pressed forward  
like starved addicts, a noise of restlessness  
growling the air, their piles crackling; keen  
for the ritual of relief. As a sign he had shed  
his clothes. Naked, he went by waving;  
the throng jeered and cursed him, thinking him wrong  
for slipping away. "Who will take it now,"  
they cried. Some hurled their bags; scowling reproach  
all the rage. The garbage man hove leeward,  
gaping the way. The trash fell short, littered  
the water and wasted the shoreline  
this end and that of the docks. His shoulder  
heaved the wheel, the keel groaned in the deep,  
his back turned black to their eyes, his face beamed  
toward the bay. "My boat is empty,"  
he called out. "Now I am nothing, a useless  
man. Find some other boat to fill." His laughter  
rang like a bell. From the far coast the horn  
of a tug answered. The ship rose on a swell  
and slid forward, the ease of the going  
at one with the ease of the morning.

# The Hunters

## ROBERT BOYD SATTERWHITE

### FIRST PLACE ~ SHORT STORY

Snow had fallen most of the night and morning, four inches at least, coming down thick and heavy. The gray, viscous January sky hovered over the tree tops, leaching the landscape of color, rendering it as stark as a black-and-white photograph. School had been canceled because of the snow. Mother had a fire in the living room stove and sat in her old rocker sewing. I was spread out on the sofa reading one of her detective novels. My father stuck his head in the door and motioned for me.

"Looks like the snow's stopped. Let's me and you go rabbit hunting."

Glen had been pacing the hallway and living room all morning, looking out the window at the snow. He didn't like being cooped up. He put on his coat, took his old .410-gauge shotgun from the closet, crammed a handful of red, waxy shells in his pocket, and handed me a couple of shells.

"Get your coat on. Let's go."

Soon as we were outside, Glen said, "Let's stop by Shorty's first."

It was a familiar routine. Shorty's place was a little cinderblock store at the junction of the dirt road and the blacktop, a mile in the wrong direction. Glen always stopped there, coming home or leaving. Out front, Shorty had a small stock of groceries, cigarettes, a soft drink box, a couple of filthy glass counter jars filled with stale crackers and penny candy. The foodstuff was mostly for show. Shorty kept his main stock in a back room. He sold moonshine in quarts and pints, and for people like Glen, he sold it by the glass--fifty cents for a half-filled, six-ounce jelly jar. If he'd had a good day, Shorty filled the glass to the top for the same price. Glen loved moonshine, and he drank it straight, using only spit for a chaser.

We walked single file out the snow-covered driveway to the gravel road, shoes squeaking with each step, the only sound disturbing the haunting stillness. Everything was clean and beautiful for a change, the red clay banks and ragged gullies hidden; only the tips of tan broomsage showed in the weedy fields. Even the scrubby pines looked like Christmas trees. I stepped where Glen stepped; his worn shoes left only a hint of tread. Glen walked with shoulders back, head held high, leading with his stomach. I had to trot to keep up. When we reached the store, Glen bought me a Nehi orange and went in the back room with Shorty. I sipped my drink and stared at a calendar with a picture of a naked woman on it until Glen came out, mouth puckered, face glowing. He and Shorty talked while I finished my drink.

"Guess we'd better get on down the road," Glen said.

"Oughta have one more for the road," Shorty said. "Mighty nasty out."

Glen patted his pockets.

"On the house," Shorty said.

"Don't mind if I do," Glen said.

When we were outside, I asked, "How come you drink that stuff if it tastes bad?"

"I don't drink it for the taste, Mr. Nosey. I drink it 'cause it makes me feel good. We got one more stop to make, and then we'll do some hunting. I need a songbook."

Tire tracks stretched down the snow-covered blacktop like two, long, black ribbons. An occasional car passed, tires hissing on the wet pavement like fatback frying. We stepped off the road and turned our backs to the spray. After we had walked about a mile, the parking lot of a church fanned out before us. A sign said, "Snow Hill Methodist Church."

"Name sure fits today, don't it?" Glen said.

Rounded tops of gray tombstones were hooded with snow. We made the first tracks across the lot to the church steps. Inside it was dark and dry, and a faint odor of wood polish and incense lingered in the air. Glen took a songbook from the slatted hymnal rack on the back of a slick wooden pew, leafed through it, licking his thumb to turn the pages, his brow wrinkled in concentration.

"Here it is," he said, smiling. "That song I was looking for. Been trying to find it for months." He put the songbook in his coat pocket. "I'm just going to borry this book for a little while," he said. "That's the reason they leave the doors unlocked, so people can borry what they need. I'll bring it back in a couple of days."

We left the church and cut through a patch of woods behind the cemetery to a field grown over in broomsage and blackberry briars.

"This looks like rabbit country to me," Glen said, taking the shotgun off his shoulder. He slid a shell into the chamber.

"There's some bird tracks," he said, pointing with the shotgun. "Sure stand out in a fresh snow, don't they?"

A little later Glen pointed to some larger tracks. "Know what made them tracks?"

"Looks like dog tracks," I said.

Glen nodded. "Yep. But it coulda been a fox."

Glen squatted beside the tracks. "A dog carries his tail in the air. Foxes have bushy tails that drag on the ground. See any tail marks?"

"No," I said.

"Then you was right. They must be dog tracks."

"Some dogs have bushy tails, too," I said.

"I ain't seen any around here with bushy tails. Only dogs I see are hounds, and they have long, skinny tails."

Past the woods, the road led to a fenced pasture and turned sharply to the right, following the fence. The pasture was huge, stretching as far as I could see. Blackberry briars lined the edges, and in the middle of the pasture were several neat piles of cut brush.

"Sure looks like rabbit country to me," Glen said.

The fence had four strands of barbwire; large red signs were posted on several fence posts: NO TRESPASSING. NO HUNTING. PENALTY OF THE LAW.

Glen looked at the barbwire. "They sure are trying to keep something in or something out with all that barbwire. Must be rich folks. Most people just use three strands."

He pulled up one of the lower strands for me to climb through.

"What about them signs?" I said, a bit apprehensive.

"Ain't nobody going to be out in this kind of weather. Besides, we ain't going to hurt nothing. 'Cept maybe a rabbit or two."

Inside the pasture, Glen examined one of the snow-covered brush piles. "Well, looky here," he said. "Rabbit tracks."

The tracks led into the brush pile. Glen circled it. "They ain't no tracks leading out, so he's still in there. All we got to do is flush 'em out." Glen stepped back, the shotgun cradled in the crook of his arm. "Get up there and jump up and down on that brush."

It was a large pile and loosely stacked. I climbed up, but when I reached the top, my legs sank into the limbs and twigs. I grabbed a limb and shook it.

"Son, that ain't the way to do it. The wind shakes that stuff more'n at. He ain't going to come out less you scare 'em good. Jump up and down."

I tried, again without results. "I can't stand up in this stuff. It won't hold me up."

Glen puffed air. "Well, get on down then. You take the gun, and I'll flush 'em. When he runs out, shoot 'em."

I took the shotgun and stood off to the side as Glen climbed up on the brush. I could hear twigs and limbs breaking.

"Damnit!" Glen yelled.

One of his legs was buried to the thigh in the brush. As he struggled to free his leg, something gray darted from the brush.

"There he goes," Glen yelled. "Quick. Shoot 'em."

I raised the shotgun and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. The rabbit bounded into the woods. Glen climbed down from the brush pile, looked at the woods where the rabbit had run and shook his head.

"Son, you got to take the safety off before you shoot." It was a gentle scolding. He took the shotgun and shouldered it.

"Let's take a look at them other piles," he said.

As we walked through the stiff grass, several quail suddenly flew up with an explosion of flapping wings and soared toward the trees at the edge of the field. Glen fired and missed.

"Those things are hard to hit. They fly too damn fast."

"I gotta go to the bushes," I said.

"Well, the only bushes are over there," he said, nodding to the other side of the field.

I took off running, climbed through the fence, and found a spot behind several large bushes. I had just squatted when I heard the sound of a motor. A vehicle was headed toward Glen, one of those safari vehicles I'd had seen in jungle movies. It stopped in front of Glen, and a man holding a shotgun got out.

"Didn't you see those no trespassing signs?" the man said.

"Yeah, I saw 'em."

"Well, by God, man, can you not read?"

"I can read fine. We're not hurting anything. Just trying to get some rabbit for supper."

"Not on my property. The sign says no hunting or trespassing. I'd like for you to get off my land."

"No need to get testy, mister. I'm just waiting for my boy. Soon as he gets back, we'll go."

The man pointed the shotgun at Glen. "Maybe you didn't hear me. I said get off my land. Now."

Glen pushed the shotgun barrel away. "Don't be pointing that gun at me, mister. You can't shoot a man for hunting rabbits."

I watched, my heart racing. Glen had a temper, and that man was about to provoke it.

The man pointed the shotgun at Glen again.

"I told you not to point that damn gun at me."

Glen grabbed the shotgun's barrel, jerked it up and out of the man's hands. The man stepped back. I watched frozen, praying that Glen wouldn't shoot him. The man said something I couldn't hear, and Glen hit him hard on the side of the head with the butt of the gun. The man fell to the ground. Glen ejected shells from the chamber and threw the gun across the field. I pulled my pants up and ran to Glen. The man was not moving, and he had a bloody gash on the side of his head.

"Is he dead?"

"No, he ain't dead. I didn't hit him that hard. But we better get out of here before he comes to."

"What if he calls the law on us?"

"He more'n likely will, but he don't know who we are or where to find us."

Glen went to the man's vehicle, lifted the hood, jerked the wiring from the sparkplugs, and threw the wiring into the field.

"That'll slow him down some. Come on. It's getting late. Let's head on back to the house."

We trudged across the snow toward the road.

"Rich folks. They buy up all the land, put fences around it, and then they put up those damn no trespassing signs. Getting to where you can't take a walk without seeing one of those signs. Damn, I hate rich people."

I looked back when we were on the road, and the man, to my relief, was sitting up.

When we were home, Glen stoked up the fire in the stove, scooted a chair up close, and pulled the songbook from his coat pocket.

"Come over here," he said. I stood beside him, and Glen opened the songbook. "This one," he said, holding the book up so I could see. Glen patted his foot on the floor, and we sang:

"There's a church in the valley by the wildwood. No lovelier place in the dale...?"



**ALYSSA BARNES**  
**SECOND PLACE ~ ART**

# The Pelicans

JAMES COX  
SECOND PLACE ~ POETRY

The pelicans glide the crest line, the moon  
in perigee draws the tide; the offshore  
winds increase. They puncture  
the flesh of the gem green waves  
fishing for bodies encased in shadows.

The pelicans hie to the shallows.  
The marsh grass bends across  
their backs, the wind's lashings  
hold them heavy; the ibises flash white,  
terns fly inland, a heron stands nearby.

The pelicans balance on pilings,  
quiet as the empty shed close by;  
they move with the movements  
of the sea and the sky. They are  
made of wind and fish and water.

# The Scratch-Off

## ROBERT BOYD SATTERWHITE

### SECOND PLACE ~ SHORT STORY

Lois, Calvin, and the baby were on their way home from her mother's, where Lois had gone to borrow money for the baby. She hadn't told Calvin about the money. She was still angry at him for blowing his unemployment check.

"I need to stop at Quik-Mart," she said. Lois was driving because Calvin had lost his license for driving under the influence.

She pulled into Quik-Mart. "You go in," she said. "Get a half-gallon of milk and a small pack of diapers. I'll stay here with the baby."

"What kind of diapers?"

"No. 3. It'll have the size on the side of the package."

She gave him a twenty-dollar bill.

"You got enough for a six-pack?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I don't."

"Crap," he said.

In a few minutes he returned with the diapers and milk.

"Boy, diapers sure cost a lot," he said. "Can't you just wash them out and use them again?"

She gave him a look.

"You got the wrong kind," she said.

"What do you mean wrong kind? A diaper's a diaper, ain't it?"

"These are boys' diapers."

"What the heck's the difference?"

"The boys' are padded in front. The girls' in back."

"Big deal," he said.

"Stay with the baby," she said. "I'll go exchange them."

"Can't you buy me just one beer?"

"No," she said.

Inside the store, an elderly man was at the counter buying scratch-offs. She recognized him from the park near the apartments where she and Calvin lived. He turned and smiled at Lois. "Sorry to hold you up, young lady."

"It's okay," she said. "I just need to exchange these." She held up the diapers for the clerk to see.

"Just put them back and get the ones you want," the clerk said.

Lois went to the shelves that held diapers and got the correct kind. She stopped by the magazine rack and leafed through a copy of *Us* and put it back.

"Got a coin on you?" Calvin asked when she got in the car.

"What for?"

"This," he said, holding up a scratch-off card.

“Where did you get that?”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out.”

“Did you buy it?”

“No, Lois, I didn’t buy it. Okay? That old fart that was in the store dropped it.”

He began scratching off the covered numbers with his fingernail.

“Where did he drop it?”

“Over there,” he said, pointing.

“Did you leave the baby in the car?”

“I was only gone a minute.”

“Calvin, I told you to never leave the baby alone in the car.”

“Whoa!” he said. “Look at this.” He handed her the card. “Does this say what I think it says?”

She looked at the card.

“What?”

“It’s worth five thousand dollars. I can’t believe it. Five thousand freaking dollars. We’re rich, baby. We’re filthy rich.”

“It’s not ours,” Lois said.

“Bull! I found it.”

“It belongs to that old man. I know him. I see him at the park a lot.”

“So what? He lost it, and we found it. Haven’t you heard of finders-keepers?”

“Yeah. In grade school. Anyway, you can’t cash it in because the woman in the store knows you didn’t buy it.”

“We’ll just wait until another clerk comes on and then cash it.”

“No,” Lois said. “It’s not right. We need to give it back to that man.”

“The hell you say. Give me the card.”

He reached to grab it.

“Stop it. I’ll tear it up if you try to take it.”

“Damn it, Lois. Don’t go stubborn on me.” He cocked his fist. Lois closed her eyes and flinched, holding her arms in front of her face.

Calvin pounded the dashboard. He leaned back against the seat and took a deep breath.

“Lois, listen to me. We need that money. A lot more than that old man needs it. You know we do. I could buy that motorcycle from Pete. You could get anything you want, baby. Okay?”

“No,” she said softly.

“I don’t believe this. You stupid bitch,” he yelled. “Give me that damn card, or I’m out of here. Right now. I mean it.”

She shook her head.

Calvin opened the car door and got out.

“Last chance, Lois. I mean it. I really do.”

Lois stared out the window.

“Stupid bitch,” he yelled and kicked the side of the car. “Stupid.” He slammed the car door and stalked off.

The noise woke the baby, and she began crying. Lois reached and got the baby out of the car seat and held her, gently rocking her.

"It's okay, sweetheart. Don't worry. Daddy'll be back." She looked out the window. "He doesn't have any place else to go."

Tears dripped from Lois's chin.

In a few minutes, she put the baby back in the seat, started the car, and drove to the park. The old man was sitting on a bench watching children play on the swings. She parked, got the baby, and walked over to him. His scratch-offs were on the bench beside him.

"You won some money," she said.

The old man turned and smiled. "Fraid not, Missy. They're all duds."

"No," she said. "You really won some money." She handed him the scratch-off. He took the card and studied it. Then he looked at her and looked at the card again.

"My, my," he said.

"You dropped it outside the store. My boyfriend got it and scratched it. I'm sorry."

The old man picked up the pile of cards and counted them.

"You're right. I am missing one."

He looked at the card again.

"My goodness. Five thousand dollars. I've been buying these things for years, and I've never won more than five dollars."

"You'll have to turn it in at the store," Lois said.

"My, my," he said. "Why, you could have kept this for yourself."

She looked away.

"I guess I should go and cash this in. Would you mind giving me a ride back to the store?"

"Sure," she said.

She waited in the car while the old man went inside, holding the ticket in front of him as if he were afraid it would fly away. He was gone for what seemed a long time. When he returned, he still had the ticket.

"Sorry," he said. "They don't keep that kind of money at the store. I have to go downtown to the lottery headquarters to get my money."

He looked at the baby. She was asleep.

"Would you mind driving me there? It's not far. I'll buy you some gas."

Lois hesitated a moment, looking at the gas gauge. She had half a tank, just enough to last until the end of the week. "Okay," she said, "if it won't take too long."

"It shouldn't."

They rode in silence, the old man staring at the ticket.

He was gone about twenty minutes, and Lois was getting worried about the milk spoiling. The baby was fussing. Lois lifted her out of the car seat.

"You're hungry, I know, sweetheart, and you need changing."

She changed the baby's diaper, lifted her blouse and bra and let the baby suckle.

"I still have a little milk left, enough to last you until I get you home anyway," she said. "Maybe Daddy will be there."

When she saw the old man leaving the building, she put the baby back in the car seat. The man was holding two envelopes and smiling broadly. He handed her one of the thick envelopes. It was full of new one-hundred dollar bills. Ten of them. Stiff and shiny. She rubbed the bills with her thumb and handed the envelope back.

"No, no. That's your share," the man said.

"I can't take this," Lois said. "It's your money."

"Sure you can," the man said. "Just a little while ago, you had five thousand dollars, and I had nothing. Then I had five thousand dollars, and you had nothing. I think it's only proper that we share it."

"You don't have to do this. Just give me five dollars for gas. Okay?"

"Nope. It's settled. That's your money."

She looked at the bills. "I've never had.... I've never even seen this much money."

"Now you have," the old man said.

She looked at the bills again.

"I don't know what to say except thank you."

"That's aplenty. Now, you can take me home. I'm going to have some fun figuring out what to do with my share," he said. "What are you going to do with yours?"

"I don't know. I don't know yet. There's just so much...."

"Well, make sure you buy something nice for that pretty baby."

She smiled. "I will," she said. "I will."



JESSICA WALDRON



## SARAH SCOTT

# Best Film in a Foreign Language

DIANA JURSS

When will we live in harmony?  
Does this situation please anyone?  
My father once slapped me.  
He saw me on TV burning tires.  
He said, "Do you want to get killed?"  
I said "I was just throwing rocks.  
This is our land!"

My friend and I stood at the window.  
A canister landed in our courtyard.  
Smoke came under the door.  
The smoke was white, then yellow,  
then black and smelled like mint.  
I felt as if I wanted to tear myself apart.  
Some people went into seizures  
and were taken to the hospital.

Then they started blocking the roads  
and demolishing houses.  
We ran up to the olive grove where our  
neighbors were pushing their things  
on a cart.  
Those explosions we heard still ring in my head.

How wide are God's wings?  
Where is His avenging angel?

Longer ago we'd lay our backpacks in the grass  
and walk barefoot to the sea. We'd watch  
the fishermen bring in their catch.  
Before that, we stole tomatoes from the market,  
skipped school, and hid in our tree house.

Best friends are like shadows.  
The beautiful places take you away.  
Today I pray for his soul because it's all I can do.  
Let them close the door;  
we'll go through the window.



SHANEKA ALLEN

## Variations on a Theme

### JAMES COX

Even though light spreads through space  
from star to star,  
from stars to your eyes,  
from sun to earth,  
you don't see the light in space.  
The blackness of space is radiant with unseen light.

The white shirt in the closet offers the shape of a man.  
The child's mind accepts the idea  
and adds the contours of a shaded face;  
so difficult to see;  
it seems to swell and turn.  
The child awaits the opening eyes,  
white orbs that might roll apart  
or forward through the air,  
the initiation of a gruesome thrill.

When light makes contact with molecules of the atmosphere,  
molecules of leaves, or molecules of a dirt road  
we see the blue, green, and red-brown  
poetry of creation.  
In the same way,  
when you kiss your child,  
the awareness of love comes into existence.

There were boulders, slant and gray,  
tumbled together like slabs of clay:  
like a mother, they made a triangular cave:  
we went inside the cool shadows  
and only then became real.

You can sit in a garden on a wood bench  
 and stare at the lemony light  
 painted in wide swaths,  
 with the gray air congealing here and there,  
 gray as amoebas under glass,  
 gray as a piece of shattered cloud.  
 You can watch the yellow separate  
 into a million mist light;  
 a mist for a moment.  
 Your mind is such a mist of lemony light:  
 not your gray matter, your mind.

They always tell you not to look  
 directly at the sun and you always  
 do look directly at the sun.  
 The sun's dagger stabs your brain.  
 Then you know the dark space through which light travels.  
 Between the wick and the flame  
 lies an invisible teardrop,  
 colorless and clear — a passage  
 into other dimensions.  
 It holds the flame open.  
 It smells of sugar and burnt hair.

Between the skin and the caustic atmosphere  
 lies a thin insubstantial invisibility,  
 a watery film of spoken air,  
 a thin skin of words that enables us to glide  
 unseen through worlds:  
 It holds us together.  
 It holds us apart.

The kaleidoscopic glitter in the eyes of monks —  
 I have felt this same energetic rhyme;  
 this trope dances in my eyes.  
 Others wonder at it as I wonder at it.  
 I respect their wonder: they respect my trope.  
 No one says anything.

Before we go to sleep, while we rest on pillows,  
 the moon of an idea  
 floats through the theater of the room:  
 the shadows of our talk cloud the moon,  
 alter the shape of the moon,  
 swallow the moon.

In a cheap motel  
A dark box with no cool air  
Far away from home

Headlights from the road  
Traveling bands play on the walls  
Chiaroscuro

Before the sunrise  
With no hot coffee or cream  
I work this poem

## Anastasia's Boy

ALLEN IRELAND

"Child, come back—" his mother calls, cajolingly,  
Standing in the doorway, with the same tone  
She uses when she calls him in for supper,  
Inviting him to death. "Don't worry, ma'am,  
We won't hurt him," says the man in uniform.  
It will be painless, as his father's was,  
As hers will be. Her husband is still slumped  
Over his desk the way she often found him  
At daybreak after another sleepless night  
Of writing his polemic against the state.  
The army man sprays something in her hair.  
"What does that do?" she wonders, knowingly.  
"You'll see." But she can not see anything:  
She is already dead.... And now the boy  
Is running even faster for his life  
Down the steep valley of his parents' farm,  
His heart exploding. Is this what's meant, he asks,  
By the Valley of the Shadow of Death?  
He remembers the movie he saw once  
About the Russian girl whose folks were killed.  
*Anastasia*.... She lived! She lived, didn't she?



MORGAN WELLS

# The Old Walnut Tree

KATHY WILSON

I've watched this tree for years.  
Green in the spring—Yellow and brown in the fall  
Full of snow and bare in the winter.  
Now—October 27, 2012—IT IS GONE!  
I knew it was dead but...  
It was a haven for birds,  
The cows stood beneath...  
Squirrels ate the walnuts it dropped.  
NOW—IT IS GONE!  
Saturday morning as we came to the end of the road,  
It lay on the ground!  
Men with chain saws were there  
They left the big log and small branches.  
That beautiful walnut tree—GONE.  
I know—I understand—it was dead.  
Yet—it was beautiful to me  
While it is gone, my pictures now remain  
Showing beauty to last in as a memory.  
It may be on the ground  
But...it is not gone!!  
The old walnut tree no longer stands  
In Mr. Haskett's pasture at the end of Fisher Creek Road.  
But...it will be remembered in these walnut critters—  
Made from its walnuts and tree limbs.



SARAH SCOTT



MIKAYLA EDWARDS

# Feathers

## GEORGE FRIZZELL

I watched the sun

set

without watching it

reflected in fog  
on the mountainside  
shimmered and illuminated  
with greens of trees

in  
fog and rain

glistened  
and glow and the  
fog rising in streams  
with few lines

and  
less shape;  
no marked distinction  
in shade

as the inner-lit fog  
swallowed the  
trees,  
green with rain

and Van Morrison sang,  
soft  
and alone

in the rain



JANA THOMPSON



LINDA SILVA

## Away to the Chase

### STEVE BRADY

After Mitch drove his grandmother back from his grandfather's funeral, he retreated to his old bedroom, sat down on the edge of the bed, and folded his hands in his lap. So that was that. All the things left unsaid would remain unsaid forever. He sighed and looked around. It was strange that the past twenty years had changed the room so little — while the kid who once slept here had changed beyond recognition. Was there any trace of that kid left? He stood and rummaged through the dresser drawers and found the transistor radio he had received for Christmas his freshman year in high school, buried beneath old socks and underwear.

Back then, the radio had seemed novel and modern, but now it was just a piece of archaic junk. Worse than that, it was a dead thing that he had chosen over the living gift of music his grandfather had offered. He clenched the radio in his fist and ground his teeth. What a stupid kid. What a stupid, thoughtless kid!

The radio swam in his tear-blurred vision, and he threw it on the floor and stomped it over and over until the cheap plastic casing cracked apart and disgorged wires and springs and transistors and a long-dead battery coated in white blooms of corrosive acid.

Mitch's grandfather sat beside him on the porch. Scattered fireflies flashed in the broom sedge, and the sparse summer stars glittered against the darkening purple sky above the tree line along the creek. The old man's fingers flew up and down the neck of the old claw hammer banjo as he warbled:

*See all the wild deer, trembling, panting....  
One moment, pausing, no longer standing,  
Away to the chase, away.*

"I wish I could play like you," Mitch said, after his grandfather finished.

"Well, *wish in one hand and spit in the other*," his grandfather said. Mitch's mouth fell open. What in the world did that mean? His grandfather chuckled.

"You ain't never heard that? *Wish in one hand and spit in the other and see which one fills up first*. Hit's just a way of saying you've got to work hard at a thing afore it comes to you."

"I still wish playing this banjo was a little easier."

"Careful what you wish for," his grandfather said. "Some folks say a thing that comes too easy ain't worth having. In fact, some say hit's a curse."

"I don't see how being cursed with a little talent could hurt."

"You've got talent aplenty. Look at what you can do, not at what you can't. You've done learned to play some chords and frail a bit. This song here will learn you to move your

fingers up and down the neck." Mitch cocked his head and peered at the fingers of his left hand.

"What if they don't want to move up and down the neck?"

"You can do it," his grandfather said, then thrust the banjo out to him. "Relax your arm. Don't mash down so hard. Think about them deer in the song, moving, then pausing for a breather, but standing light, ready to spring away over the mountains quick as a wink."

Mitch frowned. That stuff about the deer sounded good, but his fingers seemed more like balkish mules; nevertheless, he forced them to start moving, and even though they didn't exactly fly up and down the fret board of the banjo like deer flying up and down the mountains, music started to come out of the old banjo. He couldn't believe it. This was great! Maybe it didn't sound as good as when his grandfather played; but in a way, it was better. This was his music! It came from somewhere inside him. How was that possible? He stopped and grinned at his granddaddy. The old man returned a smile that spread even wider and slapped Mitch's knee.

"There you go," he said. "There ain't no stopping you now." And at first there wasn't.

Within a few days, Mitch could plod through the deer chase using the basic strum his grandfather called fracturing. Then he learned the more advanced double-thumb technique, and the tune raced away beneath his fingers. After that, Mitch sat on the porch with his grandfather and learned more licks every night. During the day, when his grandfather was away at work clearing brush for the power company, Mitch carried the banjo with him as he wandered through the woods or sat beside the creek.

The process of learning to play proved a refuge, but sometimes, an enormous heaviness descended upon him and turned him into stone. What was the use of learning to play the banjo? What was the use of anything? His parents had been here one moment and gone the next. It wasn't a mystery. They were dead and gone. And there weren't any miracles. They weren't coming back. There was only one cold certainty. He was alone, and he would always be alone. Nothing could ever change that.

But then, no matter how long he sat frozen by grief, pain, and doubt, the banjo invariably worked a kind of magic that thawed his fingers along with his mind and spirit and drew him away to the chase, away from the disengagement of death back into an engagement with life.

The summer passed and Mitch entered high school, where new friends and activities began to fill the empty spaces of his life previously filled by the banjo. Like many of his friends, he received one of the new transistor radios that had become all the rage for Christmas that year, and at night, when the local county radio station was off the air, he lay under the covers when he was supposed to be asleep and listened to the sounds of Motown and the music of the British invasion coming out of Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta. Those exotic sounds conjured dreams of the sophisticated life he believed he was destined for — far away from the little hick town of Hamilton he had been sentenced to live in when his parents died. He played the banjo less and less.

Finally, when his grandfather asked if he would like to learn a new song one day, Mitch said: *Good grief, Grandaddy. That old claw hammer banjo is square. Even people who play the banjo don't play that old style anymore.* After that day, his grandfather never asked him if he wanted to play again, and he never heard his grandfather play again either. Those careless words came back to haunt him through the years.

After he graduated from college, Mitch went to work for an insurance firm in Atlanta and seldom returned to the little mountain town of Hamilton where his grandparents remained, except for an occasional visit over Christmas or Thanksgiving. Over the course of the next twenty years, he married and divorced, fought depression and alcohol addiction, and endured a job that paid well but stole his dreams and dignity. In a way, it was just what he had wished for, and like his grandfather had predicted, it was a curse. Then one day, he received the inevitable call that his grandfather had passed away; and now, here he was — adrift and bereft in past regrets.

Mitch's grandmother heard him smash the radio and came to the door.

"Son, are you all right?" she said. Mitch swiped his face with his shirt cuff but didn't turn to look at her.

"Yeah," he said, hurrying around the bed so she wouldn't see what he had done. "I was just thinking about how granddaddy tried to teach me to play that old banjo. About how I hurt his feelings."

"What makes you think that, son?"

"Oh, you know. I stopped playing. Said some stuff I shouldn't have. Thoughtless stuff."

"Good Lord, son. You didn't hurt your granddaddy's feelings."

"I wish I believed that, Grandma."

"Well, believe it," she said. "When you first come here after your folks got killed, all you done was mope about. Your granddaddy and me was worried to death. Then your granddaddy had the idea to start teaching you how to play that old banjo, and you snapped out of it. You went to high school that fall, started to make friends, started to smile and act a bit normal again, and we was just relieved."

"But I still think he was disappointed that I quit playing," Mitch said.

The thing he couldn't bring himself to say was that his grandfather must have been disappointed to see the person he became. Unspoken or not, though, his grandmother heard it.

"He might've been a bit disappointed you quit playing, but he was never disappointed in you," she said. "Your granddaddy always seen the big picture. He wouldn't want you to have no regrets. He was a wise man." Mitch nodded, and when he spoke, his voice cracked.

"He must've been, Grandma, because he married a wise woman."

"Good grief, son," his grandmother said, and batted the air with her hand. "Hush, or you'll have me blushing and crying all at once. Put all them old hurts away and give your

old granny a hug so she can go lay down."

"Good night, Grandma," he said, and hugged her tight. When she started to leave, she paused at the door.

"Don't cut your foot on whatever you broke over there behind the bed." Mitch laughed. Had he really thought he could put anything past her? Another question had been answered. That stupid kid was still right here.

After his grandmother was gone, Mitch cleaned up the pieces of the broken radio, slipped outside, and sat on the porch. The moon rose behind the trees, and when he looked beside him he saw his grandfather sitting there just like he had on those summer nights long ago.

"There is one regret I have, Granddaddy," Mitch said. "I wish you could finish teaching me to play that old banjo." His grandfather grinned.

"Spit in one hand and wish in the other..." he said, and then faded away in the moonlight.

Mitch sat for a long time and looked out over the field. Then he tiptoed inside to the hall closet where the old banjo sat in its case and carried it out to the porch.

When he sat down and cradled the banjo, he didn't know if he remembered how to play a single lick, or even how to tune it. But when he plucked a few tentative chords, it was still in tune. He had been wrong. His grandfather had never quit playing. He had only stopped playing around him because he didn't want to pressure him or bring up bad memories. How many nights had he sat on this porch and played when Mitch was out with friends, or off in college, or away in Atlanta? Had he paused sometimes and thought about his beloved daughter who died in a tragic car wreck? Or the troubled grandson she left behind in his care?

No matter what he thought about, at least he always had this old banjo to pull him back and carry him away. Mitch hadn't taken that from his grandfather after all. It was sure good to know. Something tight broke apart in his chest and melted away.

As scattered fireflies rose in the field and heat lightning flickered across the sky, Mitch began to play. His fingers were hesitant and stiff at first, but the music was still there, in his memory, in his fingers, deep in some miraculous and mysterious place inside. And as the soft notes rang out, his voice raced along with them and he sang:

*See all the wild deer, trembling, panting....*

*One moment, pausing, no longer standing,*

*Away to the chase, away.*



KATHY WILSON

## Two Grandmothers

MARIETTA DOMKOWSKI

Waiting outside the door  
We have been here before  
Though always on the other side  
Now smile and beam with pride  
This, our first grandbaby  
Will arrive here today...maybe.

Hear the newborn baby cry  
A grandbaby for you and I  
Hear the words...It's a girl  
Welcome baby to our world  
A bundle of love comes to be  
The nurses hold her up for us to see.

At the nursery window, not wanting to go  
We wait and watch the newborn below  
Her first bath, now bundled and warm  
She lay so quiet after the ride in the storm  
We stay calm and still as she  
What the future holds will be.

Again the nurse holds her up for us to see  
And lo and behold, you wouldn't believe  
Baby opens her blue eyes, directed at us  
As if to say, what's all the fuss  
Then gives a smile with dimples to show  
She knows and loves us more than we know.



MIKAYLA EDWARDS

## Cherry Tree

MARIETTA DOMKOWSKI

March winds howl and blow as if to shaken  
The cherry trees that need to awaken  
Soon tiny buds appear and in a few weeks' time  
Burst open to reveal a pink and white design.

Cherry blossoms heralds spring is here  
An anticipated delight year after year.  
For a few weeks she wears her gown  
The stage is set now for her crown.

Warm April showers, leaves fill the tree  
A place of refuge for you and me.  
A child perched high on a limb with a book in hand  
Like a landowner surveying his land.

Ladies rest beneath for relief from the sun  
Pondering the best is yet to come.  
As days grow longer and warmer and fill each berry  
Now is the time to savor a big juicy cherry.

Harvest pails of sweet cherries fresh from the tree  
Make into jams, jellies, and pies for you and me.  
The cherry tree brings us such delights  
Beauty, refuge, and food far into days and nights.



MELISSA WISE

# Messages from Spider Clan

## CHARLENE HOMOLKA

“Well, hello there. Where’ve you been?” A golden orb spider, as big as my thumb nail, dangled in front of my eyes from the front door jamb. These gorgeous spiders spin geometrically perfect webs up to three feet across. The yellow, white and black markings on her thorax echoed the angles of those creations. Her kind and I were old friends, but I hadn’t seen one for over a decade. I delicately lifted her by the strand and deposited her on the clematis. “Godspeed, Grandmother Spider.” I hoped I’d find her web later.

Every year at our other house, a golden orb had spun her last web in mid-autumn across the steps from our upper and lower driveways. My family had strict orders to not disturb her. I was her guardian. She came to construct her egg sac and await winter’s coming. Every day I looked to see if she still kept her vigil in the middle of her web. On the morning of the first frost, the web was always empty. Her life was over, but her progeny would survive, secure in their cozy sac. At least one always returned to their birthplace.

Occasionally I came upon others in the woods. Their webs were usually tattered without my protection. I walked through one once and thought I’d never get the sticky stuff off me.

One fall, she didn’t appear in her usual place. That year’s golden orb had chosen a new location. Under the second story deck, she’d spun a wide and perfect web anchored to the floor and a support post. I was pleased. I wouldn’t have to re-direct my family’s traffic. I could watch her more easily and she was safer from wind and rain. I felt she was aware of me and thankful for my protection. There was a mystical quality to our relationship.

One year, I couldn’t find the web. I searched everywhere around the house where she might have woven her art. Then one morning, I awoke craving coffee. The aroma of the automatically brewed elixir lured me into the kitchen. I got down a mug and reached for the coffee pot. A perfectly spun web, with a golden orb perched in the middle of it, barred my way. I’m a night owl and stay up late reading. Somehow between the wee hours of the morning and eight o’clock, she’d entered my home and constructed a masterpiece. It spanned four feet from the faucets to the island and back again to the refrigerator. I was awed. I’d never seen her kind inside a building—not even a barn. The web was sheer perfection, geometrically symmetrical, with spokes and radii spaced as though she’d used a protractor.

I sat down without my coffee and stared. I just couldn’t disturb her and her work of art. I studied her, knowing there was a message there. Native American animal medicine teaches that Spider is the dreamweaver. With her web—which contains all the angles of

the letters—she taught Man to write. Thus, she's the keeper of the primordial alphabet. Her two-lobed body forms an eight, the symbol for infinity and the infinite possibilities of creation. Her eight legs represent the winds of change and the directions of the medicine wheel. Spider weaves the web of fate for her prey and cautions us to not get caught in a web of illusion. She represents the female creative force and reminds us to be alert to what arrives at the edges of our web of life.

I communed with Grandmother Spider for half an hour that morning, jotting down insights about her message to me. Finally, the need for coffee won out. With great regret, I apologized and captured her in a butter tub. Poof, the web disappeared. There should have been a huge amount of sticky stuff all over me, but there wasn't. Puzzled, I carried her outside and gently dislodged her onto my deck. She took a few steps and stopped. It was as if she looked over her shoulder to say, "Did you get it? Write!"

I'd only kept travel journals before, but this experience was so profound that I immediately bought two purple journals and two purple pens. Purple is linked to the third eye, the energy center in the middle of the forehead where we perceive non-material things. I was experiencing a spurt of spiritual growth that year. I'd record my epiphanies in one journal and encounters with nature in the other.

Spider Clan wasn't finished with me yet. They had more to tell me.

My husband introduced me to the magic of the waterfalls near Cashiers. We especially love a spot above Whitewater Falls. We call it our Carolina mountain beach. The Horsepasture River cascades over rocks and into still pools deep enough for swimming. We love sitting in the sun and wading in the water.

That afternoon, I was reading Gregg Braden's "Walking Between the Worlds." It taught that the earth has a heartbeat, recently measured by scientists. When we act out of love and compassion instead of fear, the energies of our bodies match that rhythm. I was lying on granite rocks with bands of quartz crystal embedded in them. My mind was still. Suddenly, I felt the crystal thrumming in rhythm to my heart. My husband lay quiet next to me. Curious, I whispered, "Honey, you feel that?"

In hushed tones, he answered, "Yes. It's like the earth's breathing with me."

We basked in the feeling of communion. After a time, the pulsing stopped and we sat up. We wore silly, blissed-out grins. Easing into a folding chair, I sighed contentedly. I felt a new kinship with these mountains. I was where I was supposed to be. They had embraced me and aligned my spirit with their essence.

I looked down. There on the flat boulder beneath me was a black spider, the length of one of my knuckles. The sun shone through his long legs, lighting them up with a translucent reddish glow. I admired him for a few moments, and then he began walking toward the water. I followed him, curious when he would discover he was headed in the wrong direction. To my surprise, he kept on, straight into the water. Oh no, he'd drown! I looked for something to fish him out. Wait. He wasn't struggling or trying to get back to

the surface. He was still walking—marching on the rocks under the water, as if this was where he belonged. He must feed on small minnows and other tiny prey.

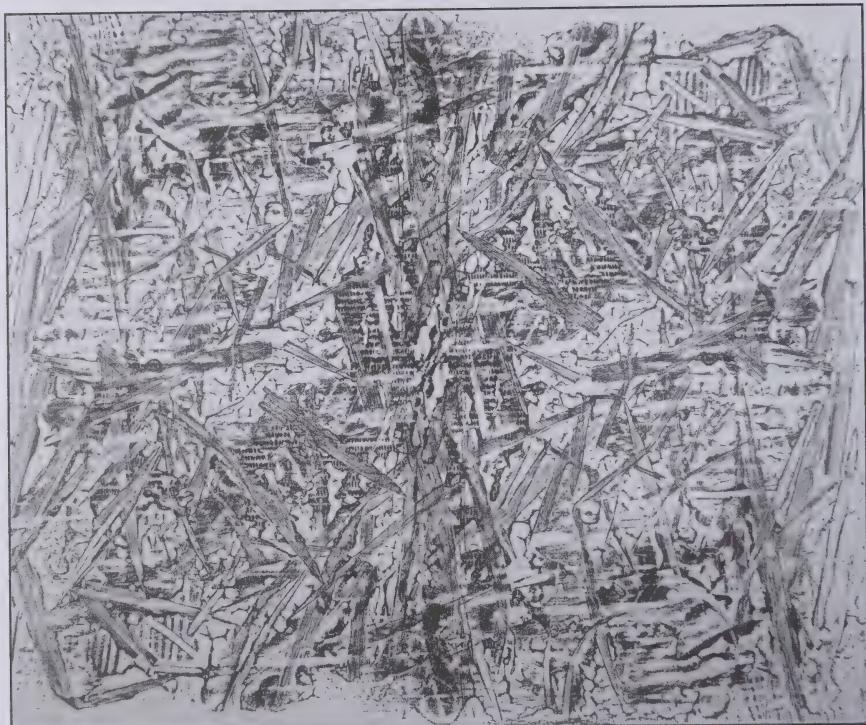
He had gone from one world into another, from land to water. He was comfortable in both. That was his message to me. The earth grounds us. It's our home. We must master the art of living here, but without water, our bodies can't survive. Water also represents spirit and the unconscious. Without a connection to our spiritual selves, we cannot be whole. We must, as does the water spider, walk between the worlds.



WEN ZHAO



JANA THOMPSON



JOSHUA GRANT

# Boredom

## NINA JOYCE

is a gift  
we are ashamed to accept.

Time is a wounded giver, bloodied  
by the myriad blades of busy

knives honed at the whetstone of distraction  
streaked clean by a shallow swipe.

There is no place for boredom. It's reserved  
for the dullest among us. We all know

only boring souls get bored and  
the bored are merely boring and

besides, there's no time for boredom.  
Our lives are much too full and demanding, we are

too rushed and too robust  
too occupied and absorbed

to receive a gift like boredom.  
(Such an outlandish present, anyway!)

Truthfully, I wouldn't mind being bored,  
had I two minutes for such a thing but

fleeting time is stingy  
and nose-to-grindstone work-distraction-work

makes threat of empty boredom disappear.  
There is no room for boredom.  
Not here.



## SAVANNAH ROBBINS



CYNTHIA RYON

# Crying

## ALLEN IRELAND

A lone wolf crying in the wilderness

Will die. Where are the others?

He is not crying for himself.

He's crying for his brothers.

A wolf thrives only in a pack.

It's not the same with men:

The lone man lives for an eternity

And only cries within.



JENNY JAMES



CHANNING LOVETT

# A Father's Day Remembrance

## BETTY HOLT

My dearest Daddy,

As I sit here on top of Whiteside Mountain on this Father's Day, 2008, looking out at ridge after ridge of these majestic mountains, I am pondering what I received from your being my dad, what parts of my character are due to your influence. Though I'm sure you have a loftier view from heaven these days, I can't help but feel you would enjoy this sight. These same millions of years-old mountains shaped your character and your beliefs about life and filled you with a sense of peace and contentment. Most of all, they were your home for nearly ninety-eight years, a home from which you never wandered far during your time here.

I think of the Sunday afternoon rides in the car we took during your later years. There were always two places you wanted to visit—Sunrise View on the Cashiers road and the “Big Cut” on the Walhalla road. Each time you saw them, it was as if you were seeing them for the very first time and were totally awestruck. You felt so lucky to live in “one of the most beautiful places in this world,” and you remarked that some people would live their whole lives without seeing sights as beautiful as these and weren’t we lucky to have access to them every day.

Your mother and grandparents arrived on the Highlands plateau in 1885. And once they did, it became a part of them. They may have left for short periods, but they always returned to the land they loved. You followed their example, and I seem to be doing so, as well. This is where I feel a great sense of “rootedness” and the place I want to be buried.

When I am quiet and contemplative like this, I know I am accessing a part of myself I received from you. Always comfortable in your own skin, you were able to be alone with yourself. I think of the many times we rode together in the car to Asheville, spoke at the beginning of the journey, then lapsed into our own thoughts for hours. We were comfortable enough with ourselves and each other that nothing needed to be said. Silence was not a stranger to either of us. If Mother happened to be along, she would be chattering away while we were off in our own little worlds, probably trying to tune her out.

You liked to read and so do I. You preferred magazines like *Newsweek*, *U. S. News and World Report*, even *Reader's Digest* and *National Geographic*, while I choose fiction books or self-help psychology. Neither of us turned out to be big television watchers, tuning in only to the news and the *Today* show.

When people question how I got to be a Democrat, I just tell them it's genetic. You and Mother taught me about that belief system just as if it were a religion. You told me that we were the “little man,” as opposed to “big business,” and therefore, we were Democrats. Although you said you voted for the man, not the party, it was a strange coincidence that those men you liked always came from the Democratic Party. I don't

even bother to say I vote for the man, not the party. I know the party will produce a man or woman more consistent with my belief system than the Republicans.

These days when I look in the mirror, I see more and more of Mama, but it was your face I was born with. The shape of your head and your mischievous brown eyes belong to me. More than one person commented in my baby book that I was "little Bill Holt." Once several years ago I participated in a mask-making class, using strips of plaster to form a mask right on my face, an authentic rendition of myself. When it dried and I took it off, it was you looking back at me.

For a long time I had your shy and retiring temperament, but life's challenges and Mother's genes intervened to cause me to become more extroverted. When I am my introverted self and don't want to confront things, I am more like you. When I am outgoing and gregarious, I am more like Mother.

The ability to hear a tune in my head and be able to reproduce it on the piano is a talent I got from you. You, of course, inherited it from your mother, who composed numerous musical pieces. I'm grateful to both of you for passing that gift to me.

I received from you the ability to live independently and enjoy it and even travel to places by myself. Mother thought it very strange that people would want to go places by themselves, but I've always kind of liked it. At least it's a relief I didn't end up with some of the men I dated merely to avoid being alone.

From you I learned my love of animals and how to talk to them. Although we always had cats when I grew up, I did have a beagle once, of whom you became very fond. You taught me how to talk to animals and how to play with them. The cats were always up to something, and you never ceased to notice, calling them "silly," "stupid," and other not so complimentary words, though always in fun. I'll never forget the time Candy Cat caught a possum and dragged it into the garage. Or how Suzie and Misty would climb up a tree next to the house and get on the roof, but couldn't figure out how to get down. You would be mumbling under your breath as you got the ladder out, climbed up and tried to get hold of them. They would think you wanted to play, rolling over and acting coy. Shaking your head, you would finally give up and leave the ladder so they could come down when they were ready. The next day it would happen all over again. I think Suzie and Misty genuinely enjoyed having the upper hand with you.

You once had a caretaker who just didn't understand our relationship about the cats or how we would talk and converse with each other *through* the cat. Instead of asking how you were doing, I would say, "Well, how's that Tiger Cat doing today?" You would look over at the sleeping feline and say, "He's sleeping it off. He laid out all night last night." We would proceed to discuss the cat as our way of catching up with each other. The caretaker asked me one time did I know how stupid we sounded when we did that. I tried to explain it was our way of relating, a little game we played with each other. I think she was incapable of understanding and a bit jealous of our easy rapport.

You knew my strengths and abilities better than I knew myself. When we went for the college interview at UNC-G, I remember you asking if they had a journalism department. Mother asked if they had a business or music department. I asked if they had a

psychology department. Although I followed the psychology path, music and writing have come back around again and again in my life.

And then there's the issue of time. You were always in touch with time, sometimes to the point where it drove me nuts. We would get in the car to go somewhere and when we reached our destination, you would remark, "It took us thirty-seven minutes to get here." An old-fashioned wind-up clock was always by your bed so you could know what time it was if you woke during the middle of the night. When I would come home from a trip, you would ask, "Did you make good time?" I admit I always felt a little guilty if I had stopped or dawdled too much and didn't take the fastest route. But, to this day, when I have been away from a clock for several hours, I can usually come pretty close to guessing exactly what time it is. My internal clock knows whether an event happened two years ago or ten years ago, and usually I can tell you just about what year it was.

Remembering dates and occasions are another way we're alike. I wonder how many people on the planet keep track of when the swallows fly back to Capistrano. Because of you, I know and notice that March 19 date each year. When I lived away from here, we had a running contest each year to see who could be the first to tell the other. Our postcards often crossed in the mail. You never failed to mention December 7 as Pearl Harbor Day, and, of course, you remembered everyone's birthday. When you stopped remembering, I had them coded in my long-term memory, so I could remind you. You thought I had such a fantastic memory, when all along it was because of you that I knew.

Whenever I am content with life, not rocking any boat, but just being present for whatever I am in at the moment, I know I am coming from the part that's like you. When I am sweet and accepting of how things are and have no need to change myself or others, I am coming from you. When I am very even emotionally, I am coming from you. When I react to things with a child-like innocence, whether it is a happy or sad occasion, I am your daughter. When I cut up with a dog or cat, say silly things to it, I'm channeling you. When I relish my time alone and feel comfortable with myself, I'm accessing you.

And when I remember all these beautiful memories and times of you and feel so grateful for having a dad I could really connect with, I am you at your best.

Love to still the world's best father,

Betty



## VITA NATIONS



WEN ZHAO



MORGAN WELLS

# Finding Time on Fingertips

## GEORGE FRIZZELL

Sunshine raindrops  
on a silkweed fence

a drowsed,  
vagabond memory  
cut by razor sharp lies  
and fade-away promises  
night flown temporary injunctions  
on self-pity / boredom

Finding time on fingertips  
in a free for all style  
with no sign of resurrection;

no teardrop stained streets to walk at night

no quarter-sliced/half-crazed moon  
to stumble on in heated words

When the knights in Budweiser armor  
crumple in your caress,  
call me at deep midnight  
whisper shadow secrets and breathed cares

When the boarded buildings on your street  
shadow swallow a collapsed heartbeat  
call me at high noon  
I'll wait in twilight rain  
call me

you're my hope and desire  
until termination  
or boredom  
of the relation



## CYNTHIA RYON

# Midnight Trains

REBECCA CROCKETT

The sharp, metallic thunder through my bones  
And through my skin gives no hope of relief  
From every breath I take. This late night vigil all alone  
Beside the tracks just spreads an aching grief.

These midnight trains that roar along the rail  
Will pause for no one, pass all unaware,  
On fire with mindless joy that gives me pale  
And sweaty skin. I watch and gasp for air.

While they? They do not know I sit at all.  
They go, and leave nothing but heated rail,  
Pursuing some exotic, distant call  
And never pause for vagabonds who hail.

But who has not loved what is hard to hold?  
I stare until the rails are long grown cold.

## Trout – Poem

JAMES COX

They say a poem's supposed to be a flowing thing  
like water going over rocks emulsifying captured air  
to foam and froth and spray.

The poet sinks a line below the moving surface,  
lets it ride and lets it sing until at last he hooks a trout  
and conjures it from shadow into sight —  
wriggling in wetness,  
body fat from feeding,  
vital in its shine, reflecting heaven,  
shocked by the absence in air.

Your hand feels its everything  
as it flips and twists;  
as you stop it, it slips away.  
You take it home and,  
cleaned and fried,  
savor its white flesh, its essence,  
this hidden thing you caught,  
along with crushed garlic and butter  
poured from the pan,  
which enhance the elemental flavors.



PHYLLIS JARVINEN



**SHELLI ALLEN**



JESSICA GAGNE

## Red-Tailed Hawks

KATHY WILSON

The sun was fading.

The sky a beautiful blue.

Time for a walk — sights to behold.

Let's go see what the walk will hold.

Spring weather has been cold.

But...slowly life is beginning to appear.

Tiny purple violets popping up to life.

White bloodroot blossoms blooming.

Yellow trout lilies with green spotted leaves.

Bubbly clear cold water rushed down Fisher Creek.

Too cold to wade into.

We'll wait another month or two.

Suddenly a movement in the sky caught my eye.

I stood and listened to the cries of red-tailed hawks.

Nature was about to put on a special show.

The hawks soared about in the sky.

Flying as a pair...

Wings almost touching in the air...

Then they parted — one up — one down —

Over — up — all around.

A figure eight — what a sight.

Heads meeting in the center

As if tying a knot or blowing a kiss,

Why not?!

Smoothly they glided in the blue sky.

Finally out of sight they flew.

Up...up...up...into the sky's blue hues.

A ritual of spring

Few eyes see.

But we saw it

You and me!



JENNY JAMES



SHELLI ALLEN



## VITA NATIONS

## Old Autumn

### MARIETTA DOMKOWSKI

A misty morning walk  
Alone...no idle talk  
Reveals a silent path  
That speaks of wonder it hath.

Colorful leaves cover the ground  
Wind and cold have blown down  
Steps so soft the earth gives to touch  
Decay and rot have made it such.

The Indian brave who is no more  
Has passed this way before.

He makes not a sound  
As he studies the ground  
He watches, he listens, he is near,  
He follows the prints of a deer.

Be still, be one with him  
The sun is setting, the earth dim  
Hold tight to your arrow  
There is meat for tomorrow.

The Indian brave who is no more  
Has passed this way before.

Hunt, fish, trap, pray  
That is the way  
Up to the mountain ridgetop  
Down to the river before you stop  
To gather food for body and soul  
To find shelter from the wind and cold.

Nothing is laid to waste  
The winter is near, make haste  
Look and listen for who is no more  
Has passed this way before.



SHEILA CREED



MELISSA WISE

## Mr. Operator

DAVE WALDROP

It's 6:45, high up on Shook Cove. A D8 Bulldozer waits in the early morning fog for his operator. The voice of Horace Kephart wafts through the cove —

"All this shall be swept away, tree and plant, beast and fish.  
Fire will blacken the earth; flood will swallow and spew forth the soil.  
The simple-hearted native men and women will scatter and disappear."

The bulldozer says:

Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
Tell 'em we ain't gonna doze today.  
Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
Too much of these mountains already washed away.

People dream their dreams of a million dollar bill.  
Visualize it as another mansion on the hill.  
Cut a road to the top to look down from the sky.  
Now, the messes they are makin' it's enough to make you cry.  
They are gradin' these roads way too steep.  
And the cost we'll pay later won't be nowhere cheap.  
Little thought is ever given to our precious watersheds.  
Now, come on, mountain neighbors, we have got to use our heads.

Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
Tell 'em we ain't gonna doze no more.  
Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
We won't let these Appalachians wash away any more.

We have slashed these mountains  
with our rippers and our blades.  
Let's remember there ain't no more mountains bein' made.  
So, let's make a solemn vow to each other right now —  
We won't rip these mountains up — no more, no way, no how.

Mister Operator! Mister Operator!

Tell 'em we ain't gonna doze today.  
Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
Too much of these mountains already washed away.

Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
Tell 'em we ain't gonna doze no more.  
Mister Operator! Mister Operator!  
We won't let these sacred mountains wash away any more.



SARAH SCOTT



ELIZABETH HAMMER



FERNANDO COMESANAS

# Musings of a Crone on the Subject of Happiness

## CHARLENE HOMOLKA

The evening news is full of numbers, results of this study and that survey. I've often wondered who takes part. No one ever solicits my opinion, or that of anyone I know.

Some weeks ago the results of one caught my attention. It purported to be a survey of people asked at what age they'd been happiest. The median age turned out to be thirty-three. I wondered whether the questioner had used the word "happiness" or "contentment." I thought back to what my life had been at that age, and said to myself, "Not so much."

As the cliché says, most of us lead lives of quiet desperation in our younger years. We were told that if we found the right careers and raised our children conscientiously, we'd be happy. Be a good citizen, a faithful spouse, and a caring friend, and happiness will come your way. No one told us this is a place of polarities. For every second of happiness, there are moments of pain and sadness. Still, when we were young, we frantically tried to grab the brass ring and hold on, not knowing it would slip out of our grasp almost as soon as we'd caught it.

"Happiness" is fleeting. It's what I feel when my grandson giggles at being tickled or teased; reading a good book or seeing a great movie; and a poem written to me by my husband, just because he loves me. It's being welcomed home with hugs by our staff and feeling the affection we share; hearing from an old student that something I said changed their life for the better; and Christmas staff parties when we're all giggling, joking and opening presents.

For each of these moments, there was a disproportionate series of events that brought pain: the phone call telling me my father had been killed at the age of fifty, never to know his grandchildren; a small-minded mother, limited in her ability to love; betrayal by supposed best friends for no understandable reason.

With age has come insight. I try to not grieve over what can't be changed. It is what it is. Even within the agonies, I look for the good. There is value to be found in even the worst scenarios. I relish happy moments, but am satisfied to be content the rest of the time. Contentment allows me to bask in simple moments and appreciate that, in general, life is good. I live consciously and weed my garden of life. I'm selective about how I spend my time and with whom I share it. I no longer seek the unobtainable, but am thankful for what I have.

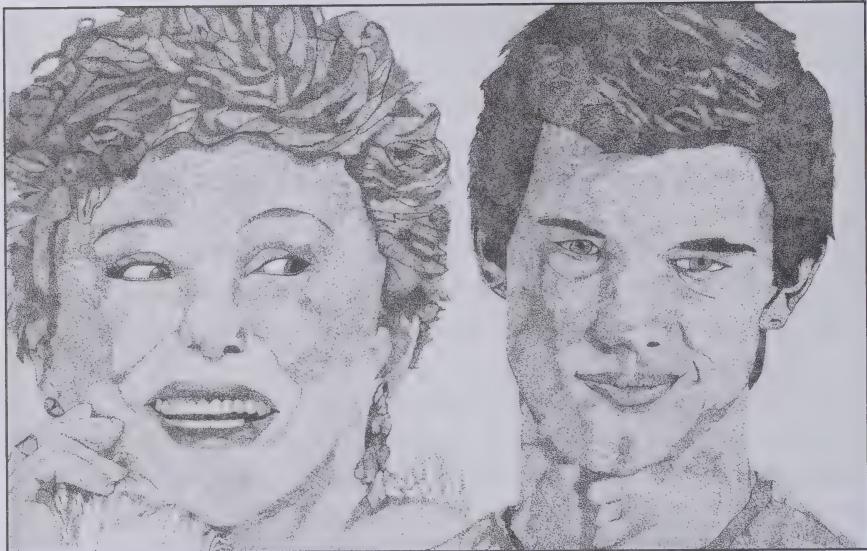
Through a seemingly accidental chain of events, my husband and I were led to the mountains of North Carolina. We've been here for almost four decades, and it's where we belong. When we first settled here, life was filled with the uncertainties and stresses experienced by all young couples who are new to parenting, mortgages, and creating a business. On the worst days it helped to feast my eyes on "our" mountains. The line from Psalms — "I lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence comes my strength" — would play through my mind.

It's still true today. No matter where I travel, when I see the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance, my entire being cries out "home." Walking beside a stream, watching the wildlife at our feeding station, breathing in the mountain air, and enjoying the beauty of our trees and flowers provides peace.

Life in our village suits me well. I see familiar faces on errands and know that my neighbors, even my mechanic and trash man, have my back. That's good. In cities, people don't smile greetings into each other's eyes as they pass. Here, it's common to strike up a conversation with perfect strangers.

After a lifetime of fiscal conservativeness, we have a sense of well-being and security, hard to come by these days. Abundance means having enough. Knowing how much is "enough," and not desiring what others seem to have, is a key to contentment. I don't know what boredom or loneliness is. I enjoy my own company, but also rejoice that in our senior years, my husband and I are sharing new things and places. We are more on the same page about life than we've ever been.

Life is good.



CARMEN STAMEY



KIMBERLY SCOTT

## Cancer Poem

### JACKLYN BALLIOT

Among us, there is a wicked serpent,  
aimlessly targeting his victims.  
His attacks are unpredictable, calamitous, toxic,  
releasing his deadly venom  
into anyone who is vulnerable.  
The victim becomes debilitated  
as the venom invades his entire body.  
No matter how durable they may think they are,  
nothing can prepare them for the venom's deadly attack.  
Some die solely from the serpent's puncture,  
and others become so fragile from the venom  
that they break.  
Some, though, overcome these catastrophic encounters,  
and eventually pull through, stronger than ever before;  
beaten, but never broken.



## ANDREA MINARD

...and the world is ending. The ground is broken, the sky is split, and the  
horses are running wild, though the last vestiges of the law  
are still clinging to the edges of the world.

...the world is ending. The ground is broken, the sky is split, and the  
horses are running wild, though the last vestiges of the law  
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...the world is ending. The ground is broken, the sky is split, and the  
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## Call for Submissions

Manuscripts for the 2015 edition of SCC *Milestone* will be accepted through December 1, 2014. In the event that funding is not secured for publication, submissions will be held and considered for the next issue.

Each submission should include the author's name, address, and phone number on the first page. Essays, local history, poetry, and short stories—as well as black-and-white artwork—may be submitted. All submissions should be typed, and prose is limited to two thousand words.

Seven persons whose manuscripts or works of art are selected for publication also will receive cash rewards:

- First and second prize in poetry
- First and second prize in prose
- First and second prize in artwork
  - Cover

Students, faculty, staff, and alumni—along with residents of Macon, Swain, and Jackson counties and the Qualla Boundary—may submit to SCC *Milestone*.

For additional information, contact Southwestern Community College's Public Information Office at 828.339.4267.

Please send submissions to Lisa Fisher, Graphic Designer, at [L\\_Fisher@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:L_Fisher@southwesterncc.edu) or call 828.339.4267 if you have questions.



